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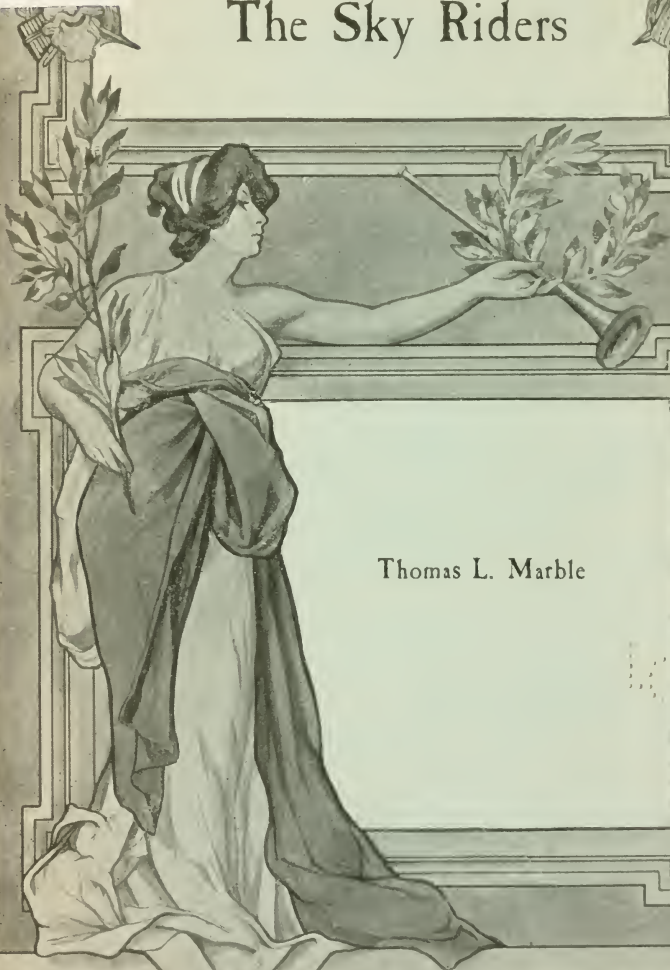
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The Sky Riders

Thomas L. Marble

THE PENN PUBLISHING COMPANY



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The Sky Riders

A Comedy in Three Acts

BY

Thomas L. Marble

Author of "Won by Wireless," "Polly in Politics," Etc.



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JUN 24 1915

no 1

The Sky Riders

CHARACTERS

ALGERNON GORDON BROWN	. . .	<i>an aviator by necessity.</i>
HORACE SAUNDERS	. . .	<i>a birdman of the same feather.</i>
TEDDY NIXON	<i>a wireless operator.</i>
KOMA	<i>a Japanese servant.</i>
MRS. ALGERNON GORDON BROWN	. . .	<i>a sentimental wife.</i>
HELEN BROWN	} <i>her daughters.</i>
JULIANA BROWN		

SYNOPSIS

ACT I.—The living-room of Algernon Gordon Brown's bungalow on the southern coast of California. Morning. "Off for Honolulu."

ACT II.—The same. Sunrise next morning. "The Wreck of the Aeroplane."

ACT III.—The same. The following morning. "The Swallows Homeward Fly."

TIME IN REPRESENTATION :—Two hours.

STORY OF THE PLAY

Algernon Gordon Brown has come to California with his daughter, Juliana, to find a residence for Mrs. Brown. An aviator of precisely the same name is startling California with his daredevil feats. Mrs. Brown thinks the aviator is her husband, and with a second daughter, Helen, rushes west to join him. She arrives just when the real aviator is to make an air flight to Honolulu, and she has boasted so of her husband's supposed success that he cannot bear to dis-

illusion her. Juliana keeps it up as a huge joke on her mother and sister. A young newspaper man, Saunders, and Teddy Nixon, a wireless operator, in love with the two sisters, are also in the plot. A Japanese servant, Koma, discovers the truth, but is silenced. The real aviator begins his trip, Brown says good-bye to his wife and is supposed to be off for Honolulu, accompanied by Saunders, although they are really in hiding near by. Brown is nearly caught several times. When news comes of a disaster in mid-ocean, Mrs. Brown is prostrated. Helen sees her father and thinks he's a ghost. Ted, the wireless operator, gets timely news of a rescue. Brown and Saunders return triumphant. Mrs. Brown, proud and happy, promises never to mention aviation to her husband again, and the two love stories end happily.

COSTUMES

BROWN. Act I. Business suit; aviation costume on second entrance. An effective and humorous aviation suit may be made of brown "cambric" cotton, in one piece from neck to feet. The feet of the suit may cover the shoes, or heavy leather shoes laced high on the ankles may be worn. A cap, goggles and gauntlets complete the costume. Act II. Aviation costume. Act III. Motor costume.

SAUNDERS. Acts I and II. Business suit. Act III. Motor costume.

TEDDY. Acts I and II. White flannel suit. Act III. Motor costume.

KOMA. Dark green livery.

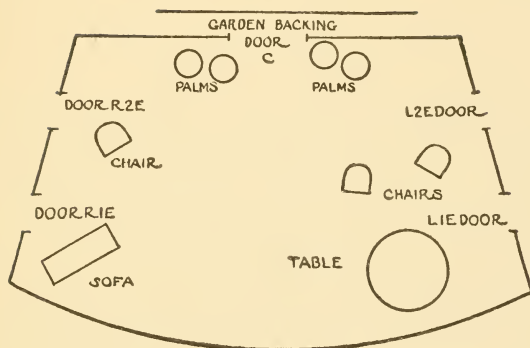
MRS. BROWN and HELEN. Appropriate summer gowns. Kimonos, first entrance in Act II.

JULIANA. Light summer gown.

PROPERTIES

A talking machine with numerous records; parasol; note for Koma; lighted candle; white duck suit; fan; wireless message; long pencil and slip of paper; newspapers.

SCENE PLOT



SCENE.—Living-room in Brown's bungalow. Wide entrance C., with garden backing, and palms each side of door. Entrances also R. and L., as indicated. Chair and sofa R., two chairs and table L., as shown. Two of the chairs should be light, of the same pattern, and should have straight backs. The room should be handsomely furnished.

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The Sky Riders

ACT I

OFF FOR HONOLULU

SCENE.—*Interior of ALGERNON GORDON BROWN'S bungalow on the southern coast of California. There are doors in the right and left walls of the scene, indicated in the stage directions as R. 1 E. and R. 2 E., L. 1 E. and L. 2 E. Large folding doors, located at C., back, stand open, revealing a luxuriant garden beyond. Table, chairs, etc. On the table are books, magazines, and a large palm-leaf fan. At either side of the folding doors there are potted palms, arranged with a view to the requirements of the action in Act II. The room is tastefully furnished.*

(*The curtain rises to the strains of a talking machine, heard faintly in the distance. If the record is available, "La Paloma" is suggested as an appropriate selection. KOMA is discovered standing in the open doorway, C., listening.*)

(*Enter HELEN BROWN, R. 1 E.*)

HELEN (*calling*). Koma !

KOMA (*coming forward obsequiously*). Yaas, mees.

HELEN. Do you hear the music ?

KOMA. I lisen, mees.

HELEN. Sounds like a talking machine, doesn't it ?

KOMA. I thing so, mees.

HELEN. Some one must be serenading us.

KOMA. Vaery likely, mees.

(*KOMA returns to doorway and looks off R.*)

HELEN. Ah, me!—how disillusioning! I fancied California was the land of tinkling mandolins and Spanish guitars. I find it as coldly scientific as the rest of the world.

KOMA (*pointing off R.*). See, mees! There's a man on the piazza of the red-roofed bungalow.

HELEN (*moving to doorway*). The mechanical serenader, no doubt.

KOMA. I thing he mek honorable music machine go—if thad whad you mean.

(HELEN *turns in the doorway and looks off R. in the direction indicated by KOMA. Suddenly she starts with surprise.*)

HELEN. Why! I—I wonder who he can be.

KOMA (*quickly*). I go fin' oud, mees.

HELEN (*affecting indifference*). Oh, don't bother. I—I'm not at all curious.

KOMA. No? All the same I go, mees.

HELEN. Well—if you insist.

KOMA. 'Thang you, mees.

(Exit KOMA, C. HELEN *remains at the doorway gazing off R.*)

HELEN (*rapturously*). Oh, if my eyes have not deceived me, it is he—my hero! (*Listens to the music.*) "Oh, come to me!" That's what my heart has been singing ever since we left the Overland Limited—and now he has come! Oh, it's fate—I'm sure it is!

(*She opens wide her arms and utters a sigh of ecstasy. The music ceases.*)

(Enter MRS. ALGERNON GORDON BROWN, L. I E.)

MRS. B. Why, Helen, what are you doing?

HELEN (*slightly disconcerted*). I? Oh—er—just breathing in the perfume of the flowers—that's all.

MRS. B. (*sniffing*). The air is very fragrant this morning. We're going to have a pleasant winter, I think.

HELEN (*coming down stage*). Of course! The climate is simply glorious. It will do you a lot of good. Oh, I hope we'll never have to go back to that frozen old East again!

MRS. B. California is delightful, certainly.

HELEN. Delightful? It's heavenly! 'The limitless ocean! —the azure sky! Why, my soul takes wings at the very thought —

MRS. B. Just like your father, for all the world!

HELEN. Yes, just like father.

MRS. B. What an intrepid spirit he has. And just to think, we used to think he was afraid of cats! I'm afraid I never understood that man at all. To think he should go up in a balloon and —

HELEN. Not a balloon, mother, an aeroplane.

MRS. B. Well, it's all the same, isn't it?

HELEN (*glad to show her knowledge*). Not at all. Mr. Saunders explained it to me. It's a—a biplane, or a hydro-plane, or something like that.

MRS. B. Well, there's some kind of a balloon in it, isn't there? If there wasn't how could it stay up in the air?

HELEN. Why, here, I'll show you—it's something like this. (*She takes two light chairs and lays them on the floor, L., so that their backs point toward each other.*) There. It has a frame something like that. The aviator sits here in the middle, and the wind pressure on the planes, here, you see —

MRS. B. No, I don't see at all. I must get your father to show it to me at once. I'm afraid it's very dangerous. (*The music begins again.*) Where's that music?

HELEN. Oh, mother, it's — I think it's somebody serenading me.

MRS. B. Serenading you! Well, upon my word. I must see about this. Who is it?

(*Exit, C.*)

HELEN (*following her*). Oh, mother, don't —

(*Exit, C.*)

(*Enter BROWN, L. 2 E. He is reading a newspaper; does not see the chairs, and falls over them, sprawling.*)

BROWN (*on the floor, rubbing his shin*). Oh, ouch! Who in the name of all that's bone-headed put those —

(*Enter JULIANA BROWN, C.*)

JULIANA (*laughing*). Hello, dad! Practicing how to fall without hurting yourself? (*She comes down R.*)

BROWN. No, I ain't. I'm practicing how to live in a house full of darned fools and not lose my temper.

(He walks about limping.)

JULIANA *(suppressing a laugh)*. Well, dad, it's a fine thing to learn. The world's full of them, they say.

(She crosses L., picks up chairs, and puts them in place.)

BROWN. Right you are, Julie. And I'm the biggest one of all, I guess.

JULIANA *(coming back to him)*. Not quite, dad.

BROWN. Well, I don't know. Here's your mother and sister bitten with this aviation bug, and insisting I'm the daring aviator, Brown, who is doing all these hair-raising stunts, and I haven't denied it.

JULIANA. Well, if it tickles them —

BROWN *(grinning)*. That's just it, Julie. Of course I never in my life went up in anything more dangerous than an elevator, but it's been such fun to fool them for a little while that I've let them go on and make a hero of me. But they're making me feel silly, Julie. *(Comes down L.)*

JULIANA. Oh, don't spoil the joke yet, dad. Hush, here they come. I'm going to skip. I'll be sure to laugh. Keep it up a while longer, dad. It's too rich.

(Exit, R. 2 E.)

(Enter MRS. B. and HELEN, C. They do not see BROWN.)

MRS. B. But a talking machine, my dear!

HELEN. Oh, mother, you don't understand. That's the poetic West. It uses the most prosaic things in such a big way.

BROWN. Eh! What's that? *(They turn toward him.)*

MRS. B. Oh, there's your father.

BROWN *(rubbing his knee)*. What's left of him. What were you saying, Helen?

HELEN. I was just telling mother that my soul takes wings at the thought of this great, boundless West.

MRS. B. And that, dear Algernon, is so like your own unfettered spirit—ever soaring above the limitations of time and space —

BROWN *(nervously looking around as though wishing to escape)*. Yes, yes; I know.

MRS. B. Oh, you're always deprecating your powers !

HELEN. Aviators like you, father dear ——

MRS. B. (*severely*). Helen, I'm surprised ! There are no aviators like your father.

BROWN (*half aside*). I guess that's right.

MRS. B. (*continuing*). None so courageous, none so daring ——

BROWN. Come, come ; spare my blushes.

MRS. B. Such modesty !

BROWN. You see, my dear, I've accomplished so very little.

MRS. B. Little ? Do you call the flight of the eagle —— ?

BROWN. Well, I'm not exactly a bird, I hope.

MRS. B. You fly as well.

BROWN. Nonsense ! You're prejudiced. Really, I ——

HELEN. Now, daddy dear, you know that's what the papers said.

MRS. B. We were both so proud when we read it !

BROWN. Oh, these Western chaps make a big noise.

HELEN. But we read about it in the Eastern papers.

BROWN. H'm ! So you did.

MRS. B. Up to that time, Algernon, I confess I had doubted your courage.

BROWN (*as though deeply grieved*). Alberta !—how could you ?

MRS. B. I felt (oh, it shames me to admit it !) that you lacked initiative ; that your heart quailed before those daring feats which have challenged the admiration of womankind since the days of knighthood and chivalry.

BROWN (*reproachfully*). You thought—that !

MRS. B. I did, indeed. Can you ever forgive me ?

BROWN (*magnanimously*). Well—I'll try.

HELEN. Why, we supposed your only object in coming to California was to seek a climate in which poor dear mamma might regain her wasted strength.

BROWN. That was my object, Helen.

MRS. B. One object—yes. But we were soon to learn that you had a greater, a more important mission to fulfil.

BROWN (*effusively*). Nothing could be more important than your welfare, my dear.

MRS. B. I'm deeply grateful to you for thinking so. Nevertheless, the advancement of science ——

BROWN. Oh, hang the advancement of science !

MRS. B. Why, Algernon !

BROWN. Alberta, it's no use ——

HELEN (*with enthusiasm*). Oh, dad, I'll never forget the day the great news came ! I read it first in the morning papers. Such a thrill as the head-lines gave us ! (*To Mrs. B.*) Do you recall what they said ?

MRS. B. I remember perfectly. "Daring feat of Algernon Gordon Brown ! Hero of the aviation meet at Los Angeles ! He flies upside down !"

HELEN. The very words ! I gasped with astonishment as I read them. Was this reckless adventurer my shy, home-loving papa ? No ; it must be a similarity of names. I read the detailed account. Your every characteristic was described to perfection. Even your antipathy to photographs ——

MRS. B. In short, dear Algernon, our doubts were dispelled completely.

BROWN. H'm ! Didn't take much to dispel 'em.

MRS. B. Algernon, you surprise me ! Could there be any question that the newspapers referred to you when they said : "Mr. Brown's daring was equaled only by his modesty" ?

BROWN. Well, that was a clincher, I admit.

MRS. B. It certainly was.

HELEN. Next we read that you had rented a bungalow on the Pacific coast for the winter.

MRS. B. We waited no longer, but wired you we were flying straight to our new nest on the wings of the Overland Limited.

BROWN. Yes ; and here you are !—arrived last evening.

HELEN. Ah, what a triumphant journey it was !

MRS. B. Yes, indeed ! We were the sensation of the hour.

HELEN. And how excited Mr. Saunders became when he learned that the great Algernon Gordon Brown was my own dear father !

BROWN. Eh ? What's that ? Who the deuce is Mr. Saunders ?

MRS. B. A very estimable young journalist who crossed the continent with us. His attentions to Helen were—marked.

HELEN (*shyly*). Mamma !

MRS. B. Oh, everybody noticed it.

HELEN (*eagerly*). Really! Well, anyhow, he confided a great secret to me.

BROWN. He did, eh?

HELEN. Yes—can't you guess what it is?

BROWN (*mystified*). I? Why, what have I to do with his secrets?

HELEN. Everything. Oh, dad, we know it all!

BROWN. Oh, do you?

HELEN. The paper that employs Mr. Saunders has sent him to California to accompany you on the great expedition.

BROWN. The—the what?

HELEN (*triumphantly*). The aerial expedition to Honolulu.

BROWN (*gasping*). To Ho-no-lu-lu!

MRS. B. Certainly, dear. Don't act so innocent.

BROWN. Well, I—I hope you don't think I'm guilty.

MRS. B. No; but you've had a sort of hangdog look ever since we arrived.

HELEN (*sweetly*). Of course we understand the reason.

BROWN. You do?

MRS. B. It isn't easy to tell a loving wife and child that you've decided to face the awful perils of sky and sea.

BROWN. That's so.

MRS. B. Ah, but you need worry no longer. We're only women—but we, too, can be brave.

BROWN. I know it.

HELEN. Why, we'd scorn to be motes in the sunshine of Progress.

BROWN (*nervously*). Yes, yes—of course you would.

MRS. B. (*grandiloquently*). Go, Algernon!—go forth on triumphant pinions!

BROWN (*sharply*). Do what? Surely you're not willing to have me cross the Pacific Ocean in—in a flying-machine?

MRS. B. (*imperturbably*). Oh, we're going to be perfectly reasonable about it.

BROWN. I see you are.

HELEN. Women have buckled on the armor of their warriors since the world was young.

BROWN. Well, what do you take me for?—a flying Don Quixote?

MRS. B. (*emphatically*). You're the greatest aviator now living.

BROWN (*irritably*). Huh! I won't be living long if I

embark in that tipsy air-ship. Then what will become of you?

MRS. B. Oh, we'll cuddle up here in the cozy little nest you've prepared for us—Helen and Juliana and I,—a mother bird and her fledgelings waiting the father bird's return.

BROWN (*grimly*). Well, Papa Birdie'll have to be a duck if he ever gets across the ocean.

HELEN. Nonsense, dad! You're going to win fame and fortune, and add lustre to the name of Brown.

BROWN. Oh, I'll be done brown all right.

MRS. B. Algernon, it's the chance of a lifetime.

BROWN. Yes—and the last chance, I reckon.

HELEN. Oh, aren't you just about happy enough to—to expire?

BROWN (*significantly*). Just about, thank you.

MRS. B. Mr. Saunders himself is an experienced aeronaut, you know—and he's going with you.

BROWN (*dryly*). Awfully kind of him, I'm sure.

HELEN (*turning to* MRS. B.). Do you know, mamma, I think Mr. Saunders is already here.

MRS. B. Do you, really?

HELEN. Yes. At least some one who looks strikingly like him was serenading us with a talking machine just now down there by the umbrella-trees.

BROWN (*nervously*). Well, I—I guess I'll interview him at once. There are—er—certain matters I ought to discuss with him.

MRS. B. Of course. Why, the expedition may set sail at any moment. Mr. Saunders said they only waited his arrival.

(BROWN moves toward doorway, c.)

HELEN. Stop a bit, pa. (BROWN *pauses*.) I've already sent Koma to make inquiries.

(*Enter* JULIANA, L. 2 E.)

JULIANA. Air-ship, ahoy!

MRS. B. (*starting*). Goodness!

HELEN (*reassuringly*). Don't be alarmed, ma; it's only Juliana.

JULIANA. Yes; it's only little Julie. (*Turns to* BROWN.) By the way, dad, have I the correct aeronautical salutation?

BROWN (*fretfully*). Oh, don't ask me !

JULIANA. Now please be nice. You see I'm very eager to learn all about aviation—now that you've become a celebrated birdman.

BROWN. Celebrated nothing !

MRS. B. Algernon, you shouldn't be so petulant. You can't expect us to smother our pride in your achievements, even if you are so painfully modest.

JULIANA. Oh, geniuses are always difficult to live with, mummy dear.

MRS. B. (*with a sigh of resignation*). I suppose so.

HELEN. Well, dad is certainly a genius.

JULIANA. Oh, yes, indeed—and then some ! Why, until I took this Western trip with him, I didn't half realize his—er—possibilities.

BROWN (*moving again toward door, c.*). I—I—ah—I must be going.

JULIANA. If you're walking along the shore, just take a look at the hangar.

BROWN (*gasping weakly*). The hangar !

JULIANA. Yes ; the place where they keep the aeroplane. I discovered it this morning : it's over there beyond the red-roofed bungalow.

HELEN. How exciting ! Tell us about it.

JULIANA. There isn't much to tell. They say it was constructed for a famous aviator who has planned a flight to the Hawaiian Islands.

MRS. B. Helen, just listen !

HELEN. Oh, mamma !

JULIANA. I talked with a young wireless operator who's staying at the bungalow. He said the air-ship is equipped with a wireless outfit. He's going to receive the messages they send en route.

(BROWN *stands in the doorway, limp and dejected.*)

HELEN. Mercy !—how can he be content with such a humdrum existence while men like father are braving the perils of the boundless sky ?

JULIANA (*glancing at BROWN mischievously*). Oh, he doesn't pretend to be a birdman—like dad.

HELEN (*proudly*). Naturally not.

JULIANA. He declares California is good enough for him, earthquakes and all.

MRS. B. (*disdainfully*). H'm! A very timorous person, is he not, Algernon?

BROWN (*straightening himself suddenly*). Er—yes; very timorous, I should say.

JULIANA (*laughingly*). Oh, I don't know!

(BROWN *crosses slowly to L. and takes a seat.*)

MRS. B. Juliana, is it possible you haven't heard the name of this distinguished aviator? Hasn't your father told you?

JULIANA (*evasively*). I haven't asked.

HELEN. But surely you have a suspicion?

JULIANA. Why, I fancy——

MRS. B. (*decisively*). There's only one person worthy of this signal honor.

JULIANA. Goodness!—you don't imagine——?

HELEN. Mother and I have known all about it for some time. We heard the news from Mr. Saunders, a journalist who will accompany the expedition.

JULIANA (*stifling her laughter*). Did you? Well, who—who do you think this—this aviator really is?

HELEN (*very proudly*). Why, he's our own dear, intrepid dad!

JULIANA. Ha, ha, ha! Just picture dad with wings outspread for Honolulu!

MRS. B. (*severely*). Juliana, I see no occasion for hilarity.

JULIANA. Don't you? Oh, dear!—oh, dear!

(*Laughs hysterically.*)

MRS. B. (*with dignity*). Come, Helen, let us visit the hangar. I trust your sister will have recovered from this paroxysm when we return.

(*Exeunt MRS. B. and HELEN, C.*)

JULIANA. Ha, ha, ha! Dad, you're certainly a victim of circumstances.

BROWN. Circumstances? Don't say a word!

JULIANA (*laughing*). Mother is so proud of the real Algernon Brown!

BROWN. Well, she'll be the real widow Brown if I ever set foot in an air-ship.

JULIANA (*sitting, R.*). It was such a ridiculous mistake for mother and Helen to make.

BROWN. Ridiculous!—I should say as much! Why, they never even waited for me to confirm or deny their suspicions, but started for California like a flash.

JULIANA. Poor dad!

BROWN. What was I to do? They even knew the identical spot where Brown's bungalow was situated—said they read about it in the papers. I had no choice but to lease this establishment and take my chances.

JULIANA. Well—I'm afraid the chances are dreadfully against you.

BROWN. Of course they are! Why, I'd rather be sitting on the crater of a volcano than living in the vicinity of this plaguy air-ship.

JULIANA (*laughing*). Oh, cheer up! The worst is yet to come.

(*Enter TEDDY NIXON, C. He has JULIANA's parasol.*)

TEDDY (*to JULIANA*). Beg pardon, Miss Brown! I've taken the liberty to return your parasol. You left it at the hangar.

JULIANA (*rising*). Oh, thank you, Mr.—er—I'm afraid I've forgotten your name.

TEDDY. Nixon—Teddy Nixon. Not a bit strenuous, though.

JULIANA. So you told me—at the hangar.

TEDDY. Well, I meant every word of it. The fact is, I'm just a plain wireless operator. No sky-scraping business for me!

BROWN (*rising*). You're a very sensible young man.

TEDDY. Thank you, sir.

JULIANA. Mr. Nixon, this is my father, Algernon Gordon Brown.

BROWN (*to TEDDY*). How-do-you-do?

TEDDY (*to BROWN*). Glad to know you, sir. Awfully queer coincidence—your name, I mean.

BROWN. Yes—I—I suppose so.

TEDDY. Algernon Gordon Brown, the aviator, lives next door, you know.

BROWN. Er—so I understand.

TEDDY. The truth is, I work for the paper that's backing him for this Hawaiian trip.

BROWN. I—er—surmised as much.

TEDDY. Did you, really? Then I don't mind telling

you that Saunders, the reporter who's handling the story, asked me to interview you.

BROWN. He did—er—did he?

TEDDY. Yes. To be frank about it, this parasol business was just a bluff.

JULIANA (*haughtily*). Indeed!

TEDDY (*with confusion*). Oh, I say, Miss Brown! I don't mean that exactly. I—I mean—er—I thought if any of the others were present when I arrived, it—er—the parasol, you understand,—I thought it might give me a decent excuse for intruding—er—without exposing your father's—
There! I've done it again.

JULIANA. Ha, ha, ha! I wonder if I ought to forgive you.

TEDDY. Please do.

JULIANA. I'll think it over.

BROWN. Mr. Nixon, you understand the situation—that's plain enough.

TEDDY. Well, I've talked with Saunders. (*Hesitatingly.*) Shall I speak freely?

BROWN. Certainly. I keep no secrets from Juliana.

JULIANA. That's where you're level-headed, dad.

TEDDY. You see, Saunders met Mrs. Brown and your elder daughter on the Overland.

BROWN. Yes; they told me so.

TEDDY. They were very proud of your—er—supposed adventures.

BROWN. They haven't got over it yet.

TEDDY. And Saunders, assuming, of course, that you were the only original sky rider —

JULIANA. One moment, Mr. Nixon! I don't want you to think that dad has willingly practiced any deception.

TEDDY. Oh, I don't, I assure you.

JULIANA. We thought a winter in California would improve mamma's health.

TEDDY. I understand.

JULIANA. Helen remained at home with mother while dad and I looked around a bit for a suitable location. We arrived at Los Angeles in the midst of the aviation meet.

BROWN (*dolefully*). Worse luck for us!

JULIANA. Algernon Gordon Brown, the aviator, was performing the most wonderful feats with his aeroplane. We were interested —

BROWN. On account of the name, you understand. I thought he might be a long lost relative.

TEDDY. Exactly.

JULIANA (*slyly*). Brown is such an uncommon name!

BROWN. Well, the combination isn't common.

JULIANA. That's what mother and Helen must have thought, for all at once we received a telegram stating that they had read about dad's thrilling achievements, and would soon be with us in the new bungalow.

BROWN. I was completely flabbergasted. I hadn't achieved anything I knew about—not even a bungalow. You understand there was no time to set matters right —

JULIANA. Oh, I knew mother and Helen well enough to realize that they'd boasted so about dad's heroism that they'd feel tremendously humiliated if they ever learned the truth.

BROWN. Fortunately, this bungalow, which adjoins Brown's, was unoccupied. I engaged it for the winter. My wife and Helen arrived yesterday; they found the bungalow just as the papers pictured it, and up to date I'm still—in their eyes—the champion aviator of America. Of course this young fellow Saunders knows the real situation —

TEDDY. Ha, ha, ha! Don't let that bother you. To tell the truth, he's in just as deep a predicament as you are.

BROWN. You—you don't mean it!

TEDDY. I certainly do. You see he's desperately infatuated with your daughter Helen—fell in love with her at first sight.

JULIANA. My! Things are progressing.

TEDDY. She told him her father was Brown, the aviator, and he hadn't any reason to doubt it. That paved the way for confidences concerning this Honolulu stunt, and she naturally took it for granted that he was to be one of the expedition.

BROWN. Well, isn't he?

TEDDY. Not on your life! Why, he's more of a coward than you—I mean than I am.

BROWN. You don't say so!

TEDDY. Oh, yes, I do.

JULIANA. Then he isn't an aviator?

TEDDY. Aviator? Why, he'd fall off a merry-go-round. He's sensitive about it, too, and when Miss Helen praised him for his bravery, he couldn't bear to tell her he wasn't what she thought him.

JULIANA. Dear, dear ! Two of you are in a hole. Things are getting more and more complicated. Whatever shall we do ?

TEDDY. Search me !

BROWN. Well, I guess the jig is up. We'd better unmask.

JULIANA. But think how absurd mother and Helen will feel. They've described your sensational flights to every man, woman and child from New England to California. Besides, mamma's health is so delicate that a shock ——

BROWN (*doubtfully*). That's so.

TEDDY. Then there's Saunders to consider. He says Miss Helen will never forgive him ; and he's awfully hard hit.

JULIANA. Well, I suppose we've just got to let matters drift for the present.

TEDDY (*with sudden enthusiasm*). I have it ! (*Turns toward JULIANA.*) The expedition is slated to leave at sunrise.

JULIANA. So soon ?

TEDDY. Yes ; everything's in readiness, and they're merely waiting for the wind to shift. Now let's pretend that Saunders and your father are really on the aeroplane. We'll find some way of keeping your mother and sister home when the bloomin' sky craft sets sail. I'll fake wireless messages every day ; and all Saunders and your father will have to do is to hide themselves till the expedition returns.

BROWN. Well, I like that ! Suppose it doesn't return ?

TEDDY. Never fear ! They'll be picked up by a steamer in less than twenty-four hours. Brown leased the red-roofed bungalow simply to be near the hangar while making preparations for the flight. As a matter of fact, it's the press headquarters, and you can stay with us there till the outcome of the expedition is known. Brown won't return to the bungalow, so the danger that your wife may meet him here later is eliminated from the case.

BROWN. Well, if this plot succeeds, I reckon Ananias better go 'way back and sit down.

TEDDY. Oh, brace up, sir ! You're ——

(*Sound of persons approaching.*)

JULIANA. Hark ! Somebody's coming.

MRS. B. (*outside*). This way, Mr. Saunders. My husband will be delighted to see you.

BROWN. Yes, he will—not.

JULIANA. Courage, dad! Play the game.

(*Enter* MRS. B., HELEN, *and* HORACE SAUNDERS, C.)

MRS. B. Algernon! Algernon! Look who's come!

BROWN. Yes, I—I'm looking.

MRS. B. (*proudly*). Mr. Saunders, this is my husband, whose fame as an aviator —

BROWN (*coming forward hastily with outstretched hands*). Welcome to our bungalow, Mr. Saunders!

SAUNDERS (*taking BROWN's hands awkwardly*). Thanks — thanks tremendously.

BROWN. Don't mention it.

HELEN. We met Mr. Saunders on our way to the hangar. Do you know, dad, he says the expedition is to leave at sunrise to-morrow. We turned back to tell you.

BROWN. Sorry you took the trouble, dear. I knew it.

MRS. B. Knew it?

BROWN (*glibly*). Certainly. Thought I wouldn't mention it, though—didn't want you to worry needlessly.

MRS. B. Worry? Algernon, the proudest ambition of my life is to behold you, my dauntless husband, breasting the billowy clouds, monarch of the fathomless heavens!

TEDDY. Well, say!—that's going some!

MRS. B. To-morrow morning at the first streak of dawn I shall be at the hangar to bid you Godspeed upon your journey. And like the Spartan wives of old —

BROWN. That—that's awfully good of you, really; but — but the truth is, I—er—I —

TEDDY. You see, Mrs. Brown, spectators are forbidden.

MRS. B. Indeed! (*To* JULIANA.) Pray, who is this young gentleman?

JULIANA. How thoughtless of me! Mamma, this is Mr. Nixon, the wireless operator. (*MRS. B. bows stiffly. JULIANA turns to HELEN.*) Mr. Nixon—my sister, Helen.

(*HELEN bows.*)

TEDDY. Delighted to know you both! As I was about to say, Mrs. Brown, the presence of spectators is very unnerving to aviators—er—isn't it so, Saunders?

SAUNDERS. Yes ; yes, indeed—quite so.

TEDDY. By the way, you're all aware that Mr. Saunders is to be one of the expedition ?

HELEN. Certainly.

SAUNDERS (*to TEDDY*). You—you have—er—consulted Mr. Brown ?

TEDDY. Yes, I've made all the arrangements. (*Significantly.*) Everything is coming out all right. Trust me implicitly.

SAUNDERS. Yes—yes ; I—I will—of—of course.

TEDDY. There ! Do you hear, Mrs. Brown ? I'm to be trusted implicitly.

MRS. B. Yes, I hear.

TEDDY. Well, then, in the—ah—interests of the expedition I'm afraid I'll have to forbid the presence of visitors at the start.

MRS. B. Well, I declare !

TEDDY. I'm sorry, awfully sorry, to have to take such drastic measures, but, believe me, there's a reason.

BROWN. Yes—there's a reason.

SAUNDERS. Certainly—there's a reason.

JULIANA (*gleefully*). Don't you hear, mummy ? They all declare there's a reason.

MRS. B. Well, I'm not deaf.

HELEN (*to SAUNDERS*). Mr. Saunders—Horace !—tell us what the reason is.

SAUNDERS. Oh, I—I say, Miss Helen, please ask your father.

BROWN (*hastily*). No, no ; I'd rather not talk about it. Nixon, you tell her.

JULIANA. Ha, ha, ha ! Better let George do it.

HELEN. Well, I think you're all just too mysterious for anything.

(*Enter KOMA, C.*)

KOMA. Beg pardon, mees !

HELEN. Why, Koma !—back again ?

KOMA. Yaas, mees. I have fin' oud whad you have send me to learn.

HELEN. Oh, have you ?

KOMA. Yaas, mees. I veesit the bungalow—I question—I inquire—I hear a wonderful tale.

HELEN. Really !

KOMA. Yaas, mees—a wonderful tale ! There is a beeg air-ship. Soon it will fly away—away into the West.

HELEN. My !—that's interesting, isn't it ?

KOMA. Yaas, mees ; it excites me vaery mooch.

HELEN. Excites you ? Why ?

KOMA. Because I thing mabbee the great air-ship will fly to the home of my honorable fadders, mees.

HELEN. What !—to Japan ?

KOMA. Yaas, mees—to the sacred land of Nippon.

TEDDY. Well, what do you know about that !

KOMA. I don't know mooch, sir ; bud mabbee I fin' oud. Beg pardon, mees ; thang you—good-bye—I go.

(Exit, c.)

TEDDY. Well, wouldn't that — ! (*As though a light had suddenly dawned upon him.*) Oh, by Jove ! (*Turns to BROWN.*) This is too easy !

BROWN. What do you mean ?

TEDDY. Just follow my lead—that's all.

BROWN. All right—lead on.

TEDDY (*to HELEN*). Miss Brown, you asked just now why the departure of the aeroplane should be kept a secret. I'll tell you. (*Mysteriously.*) 'This expedition isn't what it seems.

HELEN. }
MRS. B. } Not what it seems !

TEDDY. No. Beneath its tranquil surface there flows a deeper current.

BROWN. Yes, yes ; still waters run deep.

TEDDY. It's not a mere newspaper enterprise. No, no !

MRS. B. Then what is it, pray ?

SAUNDERS. Hush !—the very walls have ears.

TEDDY. Listen. Our country, ever fearful of the great yellow peril, has commanded your husband to fly through the uncharted heavens in quest of an aerial passage to Japan.

MRS. B. Just like Columbus ! Oh, Algernon, I'm so proud !

TEDDY. If the voyage proves successful, it will open up untold facilities for commerce—and war !

SAUNDERS. It may even lead to universal peace.

TEDDY. But Japan is always alert. That servant of yours is suspicious. We must move with the utmost caution.

BROWN. True. The Japs must know nothing of our plans till we swoop down upon them from the open sky.

TEDDY. To-morrow morning at sunrise—when the wind shifts—the huge, winged monster will mount into the vaulted firmament.

HELEN (*eagerly*). We'll watch you from here.

JULIANA. All but Koma: he'll be sleeping sweetly in his little bed.

MRS. B. And if he wakes, our presence in the house will disarm his suspicions.

TEDDY. Exactly. That's why you mustn't be at the hangar.

MRS. B. I understand. It's the duty of the aviator's wife to stay at home.

TEDDY. Correct.

SAUNDERS. Swiftly we'll fly away, chirping our wireless song like a bird.

BROWN. Honolulu will be but a twig on which to perch, and rest our weary pinions.

SAUNDERS. Then onward!—onward, like a hawk, to Japan!

ALL (*raising their arms dramatically*). To Japan!

(*Enter KOMA, C. He has a note in his hand.*)

KOMA. A note for Meestar Saunders!

SAUNDERS. For me?

KOMA. Yaas, sir. It came from the hangar.

SAUNDERS (*taking note and reading it*). By Jove! (*To TEDDY.*) Nixon, look at this, will you?

(*Hands note to him.*)

TEDDY (*reading note*). What! Quick! There's not a moment to lose. The wind has shifted, and the expedition starts at once. Come, Mr. Brown—Saunders—everybody!

BROWN. Oh, I—I say!—this—this is so sudden!

JULIANA. Fie, dad! No one's proposed.

TEDDY (*to KOMA*). This way, Koma. I'd like a word with you.

KOMA. Vaery well, sir.

(*Exeunt TEDDY and KOMA, L. 2 E.*)

MRS. B. Follow me, Algernon. Everything's in readiness, and I have a great surprise in store for you.

BROWN (*dolefully*). What!—another one?

MRS. B. Oh, you shall see! A brand-new aviation suit! I purchased it before we left the East. Come, we must hurry.

JULIANA (*gleefully*). Oh, let me come, too! I want to see you strap on the wings, mummy dear.

MRS. B. (*sharply*). Juliana!

(*Exit, R. 2 E.*)

JULIANA (*to BROWN*). Hop along, dad. Carol sweetly.

BROWN (*groaning*). Oh!

(*Exeunt JULIANA and BROWN, R. 2 E.*)

(*Suddenly SAUNDERS and HELEN turn toward each other with swift, impassioned gestures.*)

SAUNDERS. Helen!

HELEN. Horace!

SAUNDERS. At last we are alone.

HELEN. Yes—and the time has come to say good-bye.

SAUNDERS. Ah, but there's something else I want to say! Will you listen to me?

HELEN. Yes, yes; I'm listening.

SAUNDERS. Do you remember—ages ago!—when we parted?

HELEN. Can I ever forget? 'Twas day before yesterday at Oakland.

SAUNDERS. Since then I've thought of nothing but you.

HELEN (*ecstatically*). Oh, Horace, it's been just the same with me!

SAUNDERS (*eagerly*). Really?

HELEN. Yes. (*Sadly.*) And now you're going into danger. Perhaps I shall never see you again.

SAUNDERS (*reassuringly*). Oh, I shall be very near you all the time!

HELEN (*puzzled*). Near me?

SAUNDERS (*quickly*). In—in spirit, I mean.

HELEN. Of course.

(*There is a brief silence. Finally, they turn and clasp each other in an ardent embrace.*)

SAUNDERS. Oh, Helen!

HELEN. Oh, Horace!

(*Enter TEDDY, L. 2 E.*)

TEDDY. Oh, Jerusalem !

(HELEN and SAUNDERS *separate*.)

(*Enter JULIANA, BROWN and MRS. B., R. 2 E. BROWN has hastily donned an aviation costume.*)

JULIANA. There, dad, you're accoutered to travel with the stars.

BROWN. Well, I feel more like traveling with a menagerie.

MRS. B. Good-bye, Algernon ! My heart is breaking, and yet I would not stay the march of Progress.

JULIANA. Stick to the metaphor, mummy. Flight of Progress, you mean.

MRS. B. (*reproachfully*). Juliana ! At such a time—how can you ?

BROWN. Well, good-bye, all ! Don't worry. We'll be safe. If anything should happen, Nixon will know just where to look for us. I—I mean we'll keep him informed by wireless.

TEDDY. Sure thing. I'll be at my post day and night.

BROWN. He will take our messages and send yours.

MRS. B. Oh, send them very often, Algernon.

BROWN. I will. It will be almost the same as though I were right here.

(Mrs. B. *embraces him tearfully*.)

SAUNDERS. Good-bye, Helen.

HELEN. Good-bye, Horace ; we will watch you from the window.

TEDDY. No, no—remember Koma ! He may still be suspicious.

JULIANA. Oh, yes, we must be very, very careful.

BROWN. And now we're off. Farewell, my love.

MRS. B. Farewell, Algernon ! With stoic fortitude, I bid you assail the battlements of infinity.

BROWN (*hastily*). Yes, yes, dear. That's just where I'm going. Good-bye.

ALL. Good-bye, good-bye, good-bye.

(*Exeunt BROWN and SAUNDERS, C.*)

MRS. B. (*falling on sofa R., supported by HELEN*). Oh, Algernon, Algernon ! To think I never understood you ! My hero !

ACT II

THE WRECK OF THE AEROPLANE

SCENE.—*The same as Act I. The room is quite dark.*

(At rise of curtain, KOMA enters, L. I E., carrying a lighted candle.)

KOMA. The monster dragon, Night, holds fast the land in his beeg black jaws. *(Places candle on table.)* I cannot sleep. *(Goes to center doors and opens them. The faint glow of the sunrise is seen without. The light increases gradually throughout the act.)* My thoughts float with the great air-ship over the western sea. *(Turns from doorway and comes down stage to C. BROWN enters stealthily, C., and pauses in the open doorway, listening. He still wears the aviation suit.)* Yoong Meestar Nixon, he tells me thad my mistress believe her husband to be honorable aviator, bud thad it is nod so : she is deceive' —he is one honorable liar instead ! Ha, ha, ha ! She thing he fly off to the sacred land of Nippon ; bud no !—all the time he congeal himself down there in the red-roofed bungalow behind the umbrella-trees.

BROWN *(coming forward)*. Look here, Koma ; that will do.

KOMA *(falling on his knees with fright)*. Ah, who speak' ? Is id voice of my honorable ancestors ?

BROWN. No ; it's the voice of your dishonorable master. Get up.

KOMA *(with relief)*. Oh, Meestar Brown, is id you ? I was closely to the exploding point with fear.

BROWN *(sharply)*. Don't be a fool. Mr. Brown's on his way to Honolulu.

KOMA *(rising)*. Ah, yaas ! Honorable wireless man so narrate, bud I had forgod to remember.

BROWN *(snappishly)*. Well, see that you don't forget again. I'm in no humor to be trifled with.

KOMA *(lightly)*. Then I bodder no more with trifles, sir.

BROWN (*fretfully*). Since midnight I've been waiting out there in the garden for a sight of that amber hide of yours.

KOMA (*obsequiously*). Thang you, sir. I have mooch regred —

BROWN. You'd better. Why, you locked the place tighter 'n a drum.

KOMA (*resentfully*). Is id nod my bees-ness to guard fair ladies well while honorable man-of-the-house transmigrates to Honolulu?

BROWN. Yes; but honorable man-of-the-house must be back in Honolulu before daylight, so hustle.

KOMA. Whad are your august wishes, sir?

BROWN. There's a white duck suit of mine in the clothes-press at the end of the hall. Go get it. I'm just about sweltering in this—this bird-cage.

KOMA. Vaery well, sir.

BROWN. And by the way, just cut out this "to be or not to be" drivel. I'm not "congealing myself" so you'd notice it, and I don't want to hear any more dissertations about "honorable liars." Understand?

KOMA. Yaas, sir; I thing I oonderstand.

BROWN. Well, then, get busy.

KOMA. Yaas, sir; I will fly —

BROWN (*savagely*). Here, here!—none of that!

KOMA. Beg pardon, sir! I mean I will procure the honorable garments with—ah—celebrity, sir.

BROWN. That's better. (*Exit KOMA, L. I E.* BROWN *mops his face with handkerchief.*) Whew!

(*Enter SAUNDERS cautiously, C.*)

SAUNDERS (*in a loud whisper*). Mr. Brown! I say — Mr. Brown!

BROWN. Well, what the deuce —!

SAUNDERS. Excuse this intrusion, but Nixon's had an aerogram. There's been an accident. The air-ship is disabled —

BROWN (*excitedly*). W-h-a-t!

SAUNDERS (*continuing*). Wireless communication ceased in the middle of the message —

BROWN. And you and I are supposed to be drowned,—is that it?

SAUNDERS. Something very like it, I'm afraid.

BROWN (*with resignation*). Well, it doesn't surprise me. It's just another example of the luck that's pursued us from the start. I tell you, Saunders, I'm a fatalist.

SAUNDERS (*plaintively*). But—but what can we do?

BROWN. Do? What is there left to do?

SAUNDERS (*dismally*). Nothing, except to go jump into the ocean, I guess. If we're drowned we're drowned.

BROWN. Maybe you're right. There's no evading one's destiny, of course. And yet life looks mighty good to me.

SAUNDERS. Oh, I don't want to die either; but I simply can't face Mrs. Brown and Helen and tell them the truth.

BROWN. Well, I'm not pining for the job myself.

HELEN (*outside, R.*). Mamma!

SAUNDERS. Hark!—What's that?

HELEN (*as before*). Are you awake?

SAUNDERS. Helen!

BROWN. The deuce!

MRS. B. (*off R.*). Yes, dear.

BROWN. Quick! Behind the palms.

(BROWN and SAUNDERS *conceal themselves behind the palms, one on either side of the door.*)

(*Enter* MRS. B. and HELEN, R. I E. *They wear kimonos.*)

MRS. B. I haven't closed my eyes to-night.

HELEN. Nor I, mother.

MRS. B. How Juliana can sleep so soundly passes my comprehension.

HELEN. She's dressing now. Of course she wants to be on hand to hear the messages.

MRS. B. Well, I'm glad she shows a little interest, even though it's only curiosity.

HELEN. Mr. Nixon is the real attraction, I'm afraid.

MRS. B. What!—that home-staying chatterbox? (*Con-temptuously.*) Faugh!

(*Both* MRS. B. and HELEN *are standing well to the front, their backs turned to the palms.*)

HELEN. Aren't you a bit uncharitable, mother? Remember Mr. Nixon is playing an important rôle in the expedition.

MRS. B. Yes, I suppose I am somewhat intolerant of timidity. Your father is so brave!

(BROWN *steps out a bit from the palms, so that he is seen by the audience.*)

HELEN. And Horace, too!

(SAUNDERS *also appears to view.*)

MRS. B. Certainly.

HELEN. But we mustn't forget, in our pride, that few men are so venturesome.

MRS. B. You're right, dear. Yet I admit it's hard for me to make allowance for those timorous natures that shrink from mighty deeds (*turning toward the doorway with a sweeping gesture; BROWN and SAUNDERS scurry to cover*)—hiding behind—er—each petty pretense——

HELEN. Mr. Nixon managed Koma very cleverly. We should give him credit for that.

MRS. B. I do give him all possible credit for executive ability—and to show my appreciation, I'm going to invite him to breakfast with us this morning. By the way, I thought I heard Koma stirring a moment ago.

HELEN. I hope you did. If he's up, we'll have breakfast right away.

MRS. B. (*going to doorway, c.*). As soon as Mr. Nixon comes. It's daylight already. (*Points.*) See! The horizon is tinged with red.

HELEN (*at doorway*). Yes,—and somewhere out there in the azure infinitude father and—and Horace are riding.

MRS. B. (*rapturously*). Dauntless pioneers! (BROWN *moves a little out from the doorway, as though to get further away from Mrs. B. He is again visible to the audience, though unseen by Mrs. B. or HELEN. He is in a crouching position, his hands clenched nervously at his side, and in his eyes there is a strained, anxious look.*) Why, I can see your father at this very moment, his hands grasping the levers firmly, his eyes fixed and peering into space. (BROWN *edges still further away from the doorway.*) Now he sails out into the open places boldly. (*She turns and comes down stage slowly, as though beholding a vision. HELEN follows her to front of stage. BROWN dodges back behind the palms.*) Now he is hidden in a wilderness—of clouds.

HELEN. And Horace! (SAUNDERS *peers out from behind the palms cautiously*)—Horace is at his side.

MRS. B. Yes—close at hand to aid and sustain him.

(Enter KOMA, L. I E. *He carries a white duck suit folded neatly across his arm.*)

HELEN. Ah, here is Koma.

MRS. B. Oh, good-morning, Koma.

KOMA (*confused, and holding suit awkwardly*). Good-morning, ma'am.

HELEN (*indicating duck suit*). A spick-and-span tablecloth! That's fine!

KOMA (*stammering*). Ya-yaas, mees.

MRS. B. You anticipate our wishes, Koma.

HELEN. Telepathy, I suppose. Orientals are exceedingly psychic, you know.

KOMA (*vacantly*). Yaas, mees.

MRS. B. We were just planning an early breakfast —

HELEN. And find you setting the table already! It's quite remarkable.

KOMA (*stuttering*). Bub—breakfast—yaas, yaas!—I will prepare it vaery quick.

MRS. B. That's good of you, I'm sure.

HELEN. Oh, you're a perfect jewel, Koma.

KOMA. Thang you, mees.

HELEN. We'll be ready shortly.

MRS. B. (*turning in doorway, R. I E.*). By the by, places for four, Koma. Mr. Nixon will be with us. He's going to read us the wireless messages that came last night.

KOMA. Vaery well, ma'am.

(*Exeunt MRS. B. and HELEN, R. I E.*)

(*BROWN and SAUNDERS come forward.*)

SAUNDERS (*jealously*). So Mr. Teddy Nixon breakfasts with the family in state, while we —

BROWN (*interrupting*). Gnaw our bones down under the umbrella-trees.

KOMA (*to himself*). Huh! The woods are full of liddle birds this morning.

SAUNDERS (*sarcastically*). It's a charming little arrangement, isn't it?

BROWN (*emphatically*). It's fate—that's what it is.

SAUNDERS. Nonsense! Shakespeare says there is a tide in the affairs of man —

BROWN (*grimly*). Well, I hope the tide will keep Mr. Algernon Gordon Brown afloat till succor comes.

SAUNDERS. Oh, we're the suckers all right.

BROWN. We won't be if Brown gets home alive. I'll borrow his glory—for domestic purposes strictly, and then you bet I'll rest on my laurels forever.

SAUNDERS. But Brown won't. He'll be sure to make another flight. Your wife will read about it, and where will you be then? You can't keep up this sort of thing always.

BROWN. Oh, quit! Don't be so blamed logical. Just wait till I crawl into some civilized clothes, and we'll talk the matter over.

KOMA. The clothes are here, sir.

BROWN (*taking the suit*). Thanks, Koma. (*Hands him money.*) Remember—mum's the word.

KOMA. I will nod forged, sir.

BROWN (*to SAUNDERS*). Come, let's vamoose before it grows any lighter.

SAUNDERS. We'll have to keep close to the shrubbery.

BROWN. Huh! Fancy a man's having to sneak out of his own home like a thief!

(*Exeunt BROWN and SAUNDERS, stealthily, c.*)

KOMA (*gazing at money*). "Mum's the word." Vaery well. I am like the honorable oyster: my mouth is shud.

(*Enter JULIANA, R. 2 E.*)

JULIANA (*cheerily*). 'Top o' the mornin', Koma!

KOMA. The tob of the morning to you, mees!

JULIANA. Good! You'll soon speak English like a native.

KOMA. Thang you, mees.

JULIANA. Do we breakfast early or late?

KOMA. Your modder say early, mees.

JULIANA. Oh, she's up, then?

KOMA. Yaas, mees—she leave the room joosd now.

JULIANA. And dad? What of him?

KOMA (*exhibiting money*). Ah!—"mum's the word."

JULIANA. Oh, I see! But I'm in the secret, you know. Didn't Mr. Nixon explain?

KOMA. He talk vaery mooch, mees.

JULIANA. I know he does. But I understand about dad's hiding-place —

KOMA. Ha, ha, ha! I thing you don' oonderstand all about id, mees.

JULIANA. Why, what's happened?

KOMA. Well, I tell you, mees.

JULIANA. That's right—do.

KOMA. Your fadder was here one, two minute' ago —

JULIANA (*with surprise*). Here?

KOMA. Yaas, mees. And when your modder and seester come in, he congeal himself there behind the palms.

JULIANA (*laughing*). He did?—what a joke!

KOMA. Sure, mees. The other honorable birdman hide, too.

JULIANA. You mean Mr. Saunders?

KOMA. Yaas, mees.

JULIANA. Oh, this is rich!

KOMA. Vaery reech, mees. I wish you had been here to see.

JULIANA. I wish I had.

KOMA. Ha, ha, ha! Honorable bird feathers make your fadder vaery warm.

JULIANA. Bird feathers? Oh, the aviator's costume. (*Laughs.*) Go on.

KOMA. He send me to fetch his whide duck suid. When I come back, I fin' honorable bird has flown off to his nesd in the palm tree: your modder and seester are here.

JULIANA. Poor, startled dad!

KOMA. I carry the whide duck suid folded across my arm—so. (*Illustrates.*) No one suspeg'd. Your seester—ha, ha, ha!—she thing it was honorable table-cloth. Ha, ha, ha!

JULIANA (*laughing*). She did?—how ridiculous! Ha, ha, ha!

(*Both JULIANA and KOMA laugh hilariously.*)

(*Enter TEDDY, C.*)

TEDDY (*watching KOMA*). Well, talk about your laughing hyenas!

JULIANA (*gasping*). Oh!—oh, what an insult!

(*She moves to R., haughtily.*)

TEDDY (C.). For the love o' Mike! I've done it now.
(*Approaches her warily.*) Miss Juliana, I——

JULIANA (*frigidly*). Miss Brown, if you please.

(*She turns her back upon him.*)

TEDDY. Oh, I say! I—I didn't mean you, Miss Brown, —truly I didn't. Why, I never even saw you. I was thinking of Koma.

KOMA (*indignantly*). Huh! You thing I look lek ugly hyena—whad?

(TEDDY turns quickly to KOMA, who stands at L. JULIANA smiles merrily as soon as his back is turned.)

TEDDY (*to KOMA*). No, no; of course not. I was just trying to be funny; but you Japs haven't any sense of humor. (*Hands him money.*) Here. Now don't you see the joke?

KOMA (*pocketing money*). Yaas, id is vaery foony—now.

TEDDY. Then beat it! Understand?

KOMA (*smiling*). Yaas. Bead id—skidoo—vamoose—fly away! I oonderstand. I go prepare the breakfast.

(*Exit, L. 2 E.*)

(TEDDY turns again to JULIANA, who resumes her offended air.)

TEDDY (*pleadingly*). Miss Juliana—won't you forgive me?—please?

JULIANA. Oh, then there is something to forgive after all?

TEDDY (*hastily*). No—no; I don't mean that.

JULIANA (*severely*). Don't you?

TEDDY. Seems as though every blamed thing I tackle goes crossways this morning.

JULIANA. Indeed! I'm one of the "blamed things," I suppose.

TEDDY. Hang it all! You don't comprehend——

JULIANA. Strange I shouldn't, you're so—diplomatic.

TEDDY. Oh, I know I'm just a big, blundering idiot——

JULIANA. How self-discerning!

TEDDY (*continuing*). —— always saying the wrong thing at the wrong time.

JULIANA. Then why say anything at all?

TEDDY. Because I want so much to say the right thing.

(*Sighs prodigiously.*)

JULIANA (*smiling slyly*). Is it as difficult as all that?

TEDDY. Well, I guess you wouldn't find it so easy—easy to choose only the politest words, I mean—if you'd been up all night listening to those uncanny voices flashed out of the darkness—Saunders at your elbow every second writing reams and reams of "copy," and urging you to keep calling the air-ship off there in the sky. Why, I'm so dog tired —

JULIANA (*regretfully*). Oh, I didn't understand!

TEDDY (*resolutely*). I tell you the little veneer of human polish wears mighty thin when you're right up against big, eternal forces that you can't fathom—forces like the wireless and—and that other voice—the still, small one—that keeps whispering, "You've found her, you've found her, you've found her—the one best bet!—the girl of all girls for you!"

JULIANA. Why—why — !

TEDDY. Oh, I suppose I've said the wrong thing again.

JULIANA (*falteringly*). I—I can't tell. I—I didn't realize you could be serious like—like that.

TEDDY. Thought I always had to play the clown, eh?

JULIANA. No; only I—I've heard that—that little voice myself, and—and —

TEDDY. Oh, Juliana!—did—did it speak my name?

JULIANA (*demurely*). I—I'd rather not say.

TEDDY. Please!

JULIANA. Why, I've known you only since yesterday.

TEDDY. Oh, time doesn't count.

JULIANA. Doesn't it?

TEDDY. No—not in these days of aerograms and air-ships and motor cars. (*Persistently.*) Tell me, was it my name?

JULIANA. Well, if—if you must know, I—I guess it was.

TEDDY. Then you care for me—just a little?

JULIANA (*faintly*). Y-e-s.

TEDDY. Hoo-ray! We'll be married — (*Doubtfully.*) Will next week be too soon?

JULIANA. The idea! (*Shyly.*) Why, perhaps mother won't consent to our—our marriage at all.

TEDDY. That's so. She's awfully keen on these sky riding chaps, and I'm a perfect landlubber.

JULIANA (*clasping her hands ecstatically*). Maybe we'll have to elope!

TEDDY. Juliana!

JULIANA. Teddy!

(*Enter KOMA, L. 2 E.*)

KOMA. Beg pardon, sir! Did you call?

TEDDY (*smiling*). Yes, but not for you.

KOMA (*puzzled*). Nod for me? (*With sudden enlightenment.*) Oh, I oonderstand.

TEDDY. Well, since you understand so much, I wish you'd amble down to the wireless station. You'll find my assistant there. Tell him to send me any messages he's received since I left.

KOMA (*hesitating*). Bud breakfast, sir?

TEDDY. It's early for breakfast, isn't it?

KOMA. Yaas, sir; bud —

JULIANA. Never mind, Koma. I'll look after the breakfast. You may go.

KOMA. Vaery well, mees.

(*Exit, c.*)

TEDDY. Oh, Juliana, I forgot to tell you, but we're in a dreadful mess.

JULIANA. Why, what's the matter?

TEDDY. Matter? That blasted sky boat has capsized.

JULIANA. Capsized?

TEDDY. Yes, I'm afraid it has.

JULIANA. And the expedition?

TEDDY. Twenty thousand leagues under the sea for all I know.

JULIANA. You don't mean —?

TEDDY. Oh, yes, I do. The air-ship's wireless apparatus played out before the message was finished. That indicates serious trouble, of course.

JULIANA (*shuddering*). My!—this is dreadful!

TEDDY. There's one hope, though.

JULIANA. And that?

TEDDY. They may be able to keep afloat till the "Japonica" reaches them.

JULIANA. The "Japonica"?

TEDDY. She's a steamship near by. I picked her up and got her answer before I went off duty. She's on her way to the rescue now.

JULIANA. Dear, dear! The disaster itself is awful enough, but think how it complicates our—our little—er—escapade.

TEDDY. That's so. Your father can't come to life consistently—at least, not after the papers have consigned him to a watery grave.

JULIANA. Oh, we ought never to have deceived mother. I'm going to confess the truth to her at once. She'll be mortally offended —

TEDDY. Better wait till Koma returns. Maybe the boat —

JULIANA. No. (*Enter MRS. B., R. I E. She stands near the door through which she has entered, unobserved by JULIANA or TEDDY.*) Think how mother will feel to be told that dad is out there in the ocean clinging to the wreckage of the air-ship—immersed in the hungry waves—waiting for aid that may come too late. Why, if we tell her that, the shock may kill her.

MRS. B. (*serenely*). My dear, you have a strange opinion of your mother's fortitude.

JULIANA. Mother!

TEDDY. Mrs. Brown!

MRS. B. (*coming forward*). Mr. Nixon, I gather from my daughter's conversation that you have received grave news.

TEDDY. Yes, I'm afraid it is a bit grave, Mrs. Brown.

MRS. B. I'm prepared for the worst. Proceed.

JULIANA. No, no, mother! Listen to me —

MRS. B. Juliana, be calm. I am waiting, Mr. Nixon.

(*Enter HELEN, R. I E.*)

TEDDY. Well, you see, Mrs. Brown, about two hours ago I got the distress signal from the air-ship —

MRS. B. The distress signal?—ah!

HELEN (*excitedly*). Mother, what has happened?

MRS. B. Helen, be brave!

HELEN. Yes, yes—I'll try.

MRS. B. (*to TEDDY*). Continue, Mr. Nixon.

TEDDY. As I was saying, they sent out the distress signal

from the aeroplane. We got into communication at once. It seems the motors were out of commission.

MRS. B. And that meant —— ?

TEDDY. That the air-ship must soon go down.

HELEN (*wildly*). Go down?—ah, no !

MRS. B. Courage, Helen !

JULIANA (*impulsively*). Mummy dear, I want ——

MRS. B. (*to TEDDY*). Please relate all the particulars, Mr. Nixon.

TEDDY. There's not much more to tell, Mrs. Brown. The signals ceased very shortly. Naturally I surmised that the inevitable had occurred, and began sending out calls in every direction.

HELEN (*moving to doorway, c.*). Oh, you deceitful, treacherous sky !

TEDDY (*continuing*). At last I caught the "Japonica," informed her captain of the plight of the air-ship, gave him her probable bearings, and he's now steaming rapidly forward to the scene of the disaster.

MRS. B. Then there's hope after all.

TEDDY. Yes, indeed ! You mustn't feel disheartened.

(HELEN, *who has been standing in the doorway, c., a pathetic figure, gazing off in the direction of the sky, now utters a piercing shriek.*)

HELEN. Ah ! Great heavens ! What do I see ?

JULIANA. What's the matter ?

HELEN (*pointing off R.*). Look !—look !

MRS. B. (*hurrying to doorway and looking in the direction indicated*). Have you lost your senses, Helen ? I see nothing.

HELEN. It has disappeared through the door of the red-roofed bungalow.

MRS. B. What has disappeared ?

HELEN. The vision.

THE OTHERS (*at the doorway*). What vision ?

HELEN (*turning and coming down R., tragically*). The vision of dad !

JULIANA. Dad ?

(JULIANA *moves to extreme L., a look of consternation on her face. TEDDY follows her, and stands at her right.*

MRS. B. *comes down to left of HELEN, who is at extreme R.*)

MRS. B. (*to HELEN*). Are you crazy, child?

HELEN. Ah, no! I saw him—oh, so distinctly!

TEDDY (*sotto voce to JULIANA*). The jig is up.

MRS. B. (*to HELEN*). Hush! You're overwrought. You couldn't have seen —

HELEN (*positively*). Oh, but I did!

TEDDY (*interposing*). Nonsense!—how could you? Your father is miles away—off there in the Pacific.

JULIANA (*aside*). What a whopper!

MRS. B. (*to HELEN*). And in imminent danger, too.

TEDDY (*turning again to JULIANA*). That's right, anyhow.

HELEN (*to MRS. B.*). No, mother; the danger is over.

MRS. B. Dearie, how strangely you're talking. Mr. Nixon had had no recent message.

HELEN (*beginning to sob*). Can't I bub-bub-believe the evidence of my senses? Sometimes the d-d-dead come back to life, you know.

THE OTHERS. The dead!

HELEN (*still sobbing*). Sus-certainly. Horace and dud-dud-dad are through with tut-tut-tribulation. They have pup-pup-passed to the Great Beyond.

MRS. B. (*horrified*). Helen!—what are you saying?

HELEN. Oh, I know what I'm sus-sus-saying. It was dud-dud-dad's wraith I saw.

THE OTHERS. His wraith!

HELEN. Yes. He was d-d-dressed all in whu-whu-whu-white!

MRS. B. In white?

JULIANA (*to TEDDY*). Good gracious!—the duck suit!

HELEN. He looked j-j-just like a gug-gug-gug-ghost!

MRS. B. A ghost!

TEDDY. Well, what do you know about that!

MRS. B. (*with agitation*). Ah, Mr. Nixon!—this way, if you please. I—I'm afraid—I—am—going—to—swoon!

(HELEN and TEDDY assist MRS. B. to a chair. She gasps faintly, then falls back into the chair unconscious, her arms hanging limp at her side. HELEN grasps her right hand, JULIANA her left, each kneeling. TEDDY stands at left of chair.)

TEDDY. She's fainted. A glass of water—quick!

(HELEN *rises and goes out R. 2 E., swiftly.* TEDDY *takes fan from table, crosses to R., and fans MRS. B. violently.*)

JULIANA (*on her knees*). Mother, look at me! Speak to me! It's all a ghastly joke. I've been a wicked, wicked girl. And dad's been wicked, too. But Teddy Nixon's been wickedest of all. He made us pretend —

TEDDY (*grimly*). Spare your breath. She doesn't hear you.

JULIANA. Oh, what shall I do?

TEDDY (*fanning vigorously*). Start the circulation.

JULIANA. Mummy dear, say you forgive me.

(*Enter HELEN, R. 2 E., with glass of water.*)

HELEN. Here's the water.

TEDDY. Good! That'll revive her.

(TEDDY *ceases fanning MRS. B., crosses to L., and stands fanning himself.*)

HELEN (*placing glass at MRS. B.'s lips*). Take just a swallow, dear.

JULIANA. Oh, Helen, we thought California would be such a splendid climate for mother's health, and now —

(*Enter KOMA, C., with message.*)

KOMA. A message for Meestar Nixon.

TEDDY (*throwing aside the fan*). At last!

(*Takes message and reads it.*)

JULIANA. A message?

KOMA. Yaas, mees—oud of the honorable admosphere.

(*MRS. B. shows signs of reviving.*)

HELEN. See! Mother is opening her eyes.

TEDDY (*flourishing the message*). Glory hallelujah! They're safe.

JULIANA (*rising*). What!

HELEN. You don't mean Horace and dad have been rescued?

TEDDY. Surest thing in the world! They'll be back to-morrow.

JULIANA. Hurrah!

TEDDY. I'll motor over to the docks and bring 'em home in triumph.

HELEN. Do you hear, mother? Our heroes have been saved.

MRS. B. (*somewhat dazed*). What—what's that? Wasn't there any ghost after all?

TEDDY. Not a bit of it!

JULIANA. You see, Helen had a—a sort of hallucination.

MRS. B. (*rising*). You're not deceiving me?

HELEN. No. Koma has brought a message, haven't you, Koma?

KOMA. Yaas, mees.

MRS. B. And Algernon is actually alive?

JULIANA. Yes, indeed, mummy! And he's not very far away, either.

MRS. B. Not far away?

TEDDY (*interposing hastily*). Relatively speaking, Mrs. Brown. She means it won't take him long to get back.

MRS. B. (*wildly*). Then he's still afloat out there on the shattered air-ship?

JULIANA. No, no, no! You don't understand, mummy dear.

HELEN. He's really and truly safe.

TEDDY. And on board the "Japonica." (*Hands message to her.*) See—here's the message.

MRS. B. (*taking the message and turning toward KOMA*). Tell me, Koma, this came by wireless?—you're sure about it?

KOMA. Oh, vaery sure, ma'am. I saw id come.

MRS. B. Upon your honor?

KOMA. By all my ancestors, I swear id!

MRS. B. Well, then, I suppose it must be so. But, after all, it's sad to think that Algernon has failed in his mighty task.

(*Reads message.*)

HELEN. Failed—yes. But what a triumphant failure!

MRS. B. (*quickly*). You think so?

TEDDY. Believe me, Mrs. Brown, the world will deem it a victory.

MRS. B. I hope so—oh, I hope so!

JULIANA. Why, it's just like Bunker Hill, mummy.

HELEN. Just exactly.

JULIANA. Dad and Mr. Saunders will go down to history with the heroes of antiquity.

TEDDY. Hear, hear!

JULIANA. They have conquered the heavens and risen from the sea.

TEDDY. Hurrah, hurrah!

MRS. B. Enough!—I am convinced.

JULIANA. We must greet them in a fitting manner.

MRS. B. Most assuredly, (*Turns toward KOMA.*)
Koma.

KOMA. Yaas, ma'am.

MRS. B. Go to the city at once.

KOMA. I go, ma'am.

MRS. B. Purchase dozens of flags and yards of bunting. Decorate the bungalow with all the colors of the rainbow. To-morrow shall be a day of feasting and festivity. Our valiant sky riders are coming home.

(*KOMA stands near doorway, C. HELEN is at R., with MRS. B. on her left. JULIANA is near C., and TEDDY at L.*)

CURTAIN

ACT III

THE SWALLOWS HOMEWARD FLY

SCENE.—*The same as Act II, except that a large cabinet talking-machine has been placed at the right of the center doors, and the room has been decorated with flags, toy aeroplanes, balloons, etc.*

(*As the curtain rises, MRS. B. is discovered inspecting and readjusting the decorations. JULIANA is near the talking-machine engaged in sorting out records. She has a long pencil and a slip of paper, and from time to time she jots down a title. The strains of the machine are heard before the curtain rises, and the music continues for several bars after the curtain is up. As the selection ends, JULIANA goes to the machine and stops the revolving mechanism.*)

MRS. B. (*sitting, L.*). Music wafts away the hours of waiting most pleasantly.

JULIANA. Bravo! The immortal William couldn't have said it better.

MRS. B. My dear, it's not a question of rhetoric when the heart throbs with expectation. Music is most eloquent at such a time.

JULIANA. Even the cold storage brand becomes the "food of love"; eh, mummy?

MRS. B. Well, love is oftentimes—voracious. At any rate, it was thoughtful of Mr. Nixon to lend us his machine and his records.

JULIANA. Not so awfully thoughtful. (*Nonchalantly.*) I asked him for it.

MRS. B. (*shocked*). You asked him ——?

JULIANA (*nodding*). U'm-h'm. You see, mummy dear, you've set the stage so gorgeously for dad's triumphal entrance, I thought we ought to have a little incidental music.

MRS. B. (*despairingly*). Juliana, will you never learn to be serious?

JULIANA. Oh, I'm tremendously serious now. I tell you it's no joke to make an appropriate selection.

MRS. B. (*reproachfully*). Juliana!

JULIANA (*reading the title of one of the records*). "Come, Josephine, in my Flying-Machine!" That's not so bad—if dad had been christened "Josephine." (*Enter KOMA, c. He carries a pile of records.*) Ah, here comes Koma with the rest of the records. Place them on the table, Koma.

KOMA (*placing records on table*). Yaas, mees.

JULIANA. I wonder if there's anything suitable here. (*Takes a record from the pile and reads the title.*) "The Palms." Dad surely ought to appreciate that; don't you think so, Koma?

KOMA. "The Palms"? (*Laughs.*) Oh, yaas, yaas, I thing he 'preciade thad vaery mooch, mees. Ha, ha, ha! "The Palms"! Yaas—yaas!

MRS. B. (*reprovingly*). Koma, I'm surprised.

JULIANA. Ha, ha, ha! Koma was surprised, too. Never mind, mummy. It's just a little joke 'twixt Koma and me.

KOMA. Yaas—joosd a liddle joke, thad's all.

MRS. B. (*with dignity*). I'm glad you enjoy it.

JULIANA (*still inspecting the records*). Ah, here's a bit from "The Flying Dutchman."

MRS. B. Well, I hope you don't call that appropriate.

JULIANA. No—dad's a regular dyed-in-the-wool Yankee, I must admit.

MRS. B. Mercy!—such expressions! (*KOMA starts to go out, c.*) One moment, Koma.

KOMA (*turning*). Yaas, ma'am.

MRS. B. Did you place Mr. Brown's motor coat in the car as I directed?

KOMA. He took id himself, ma'am.

MRS. B. He took —? Why, what do you mean?

JULIANA (*quickly*). He means Teddy Nixon took it, mummy.

KOMA. Yaas—thad whad I mean. Meestar Nixon mek departure in honorable motor-car four—five hour' ago. He tek august automobile uniform for Meestar Brown and Meestar Saunders. They will come back dressed lek stylish chauffeur'—whad?

MRS. B. Yes—and they ought to be here soon, if the "Japonica" docked on time.

KOMA. I thing I hoarry 'way to garden and watch for them.

MRS. B. Very good. Let us know when the car comes in sight.

KOMA. Yaas, ma'am.

(Exit, c.)

JULIANA (*taking up another record*). Oh, mummy, look here! This is the best yet. See! "When the Swallows Homeward Fly."

MRS. B. (*shaking her head*). Juliana, you're incorrigible.

JULIANA. Indeed, I'm not! Why, you yourself have declared that dad flies like a bird. I've heard you say so a hundred times in the past two days.

MRS. B. But I said it in all sincerity, dear.

JULIANA. Of course.

MRS. B. I'm not presumptuous enough to make light of your father's herculean endeavors.

JULIANA. Mercurial, mummy. I don't believe Hercules sprouted wings.

MRS. B. (*in a tone of mingled resignation and disgust*). Oh, Juliana!

(Enter HELEN hurriedly, c. *She carries a newspaper in her hand.*)

HELEN (*calling*). Mother, mother!

MRS. B. Yes, dear, what is it?

HELEN. Look! They've printed an extra edition of the morning paper. And it's just filled with news of the expedition.

MRS. B. Really!

HELEN. Yes—and, do you know, there's a splendid article written and signed by Horace himself.

JULIANA. Good for Horace!

HELEN. See—here it is.

MRS. B. Where?

HELEN (*indicating a column in the paper*). Right there.

MRS. B. (*taking the paper*). Oh, what inky head-lines!

JULIANA (*looking over her shoulder*). My!—aren't they great?

MRS. B. (*scanning the paper*). Why, I declare! The "Japonica" has landed.

HELEN. Yes, indeed—early this morning.

MRS. B. Then your father will be with us soon.

JULIANA. Oh, give him time to see the fun, mummy.

MRS. B. The fun?

JULIANA. Certainly. The reporters will be eager to interview him.

HELEN. They've done that already. And Horace writes just as though he were one of them. Isn't he modest?

(MRS. B. takes a chair, R., and peruses the paper.)

JULIANA. Oh, yes, he's modest all right—if that's what you call modesty.

HELEN. Well, I don't know what else you'd call it. He doesn't even hint that he himself has participated in the great adventure.

JULIANA (*quizzically*). I wonder why.

HELEN. Why?—because he wants dad to have all the credit of the mighty achievement.

JULIANA. By "mighty achievement" you mean the—ah—baptism in the Pacific, I suppose?

HELEN (*indignantly*). No! I mean a whole half day's conquest of the recalcitrant sky.

JULIANA. Whew! A *whole* half day? Helen, aren't your mathematics a bit too figurative?

HELEN. My dear Juliana, mathematics is just the place for figures.

JULIANA (*with a sweeping curtsy*). Right you are! I beg your pardon.

(MRS. B., who, during the conversation between JULIANA and HELEN, has been seated at R., scanning the paper eagerly, now looks up.)

MRS. B. (*excitedly*). Oh, children, listen to this!

HELEN. Yes, mother, we're listening.

MRS. B. (*reading from the newspaper*). " 'I shall never attempt another flight,' said Mr. Brown, as he shyly withdrew from the gaping crowd. 'Not that my zeal for aviation has abated—quite the contrary. But there are those whose rights I must respect—those who are near and dear to me. It is not fair to them to risk my life in such a precarious sport.' "

HELEN. How truly noble !
MRS. B. How superlatively unselfish !
JULIANA. How tremendously lucky !—for dad.
HELEN. What do you mean ?
JULIANA. Oh, nothing.

(Sound of motor horn outside.)

MRS. B. Hark ! What's that ?
HELEN. It sounds like ——
JULIANA *(at doorway, c.)*. Here's Koma.

(Enter KOMA, c.)

KOMA *(with excitement)*. Hoarray ! Hoarray ! They're coming ! They're coming !

MRS. B. Where, where ?

KOMA. Down the road and swift, too, joosd lek one beeg hoarricane.

HELEN. Oh, my heart flutters like a bird.

JULIANA. Now for the incidental music !

(She proceeds to adjust one of the records in the talking-machine.)

MRS. B. *(looking out doorway, c.)*. The car has stopped. See ! Your father is coming up the garden walk.

HELEN *(at doorway)*. Yes, yes ; and Horace is with him.

KOMA. Ah, but Meestar Teddy Nixon, he lead' the procession lek one vaery august general.

JULIANA *(rapping on cabinet with pencil)*. Attention, orchestra ! *(Poises pencil like a baton.)* Ready !—play !

(The machine emits the strains of a spirited march.)

JULIANA *beats time with the pencil.*

(Enter TEDDY, c. He wears motor dust-coat, gauntlets, etc.)

TEDDY *(impressively)*. Mrs. Brown, I have brought the sky wanderers safely home.

MRS. B. *(fervently)*. Oh, thank you, Mr. Nixon—thank you.

(Music should be softened or stopped here.)

TEDDY. I have the honor to announce Mr. Horace Saunders, wielder of the pen and denizen of the stars !

(*Enter SAUNDERS, C. He wears auto coat, etc.*)

HELEN. Horace, my hero !

SAUNDERS. Helen, my angel !

(*They embrace.*)

TEDDY. And now behold the invincible potentate of the clouds, the one and only Algernon Gordon Brown !

(*Enter BROWN, C. He wears motor costume.*)

MRS. B. Algernon, my dear, dear husband !

BROWN. Alberta, wife of my heart !

(*They embrace.*)

JULIANA (*to KOMA*). Kill the fatted calf, Koma.

TEDDY. Better kill two of 'em while you're about it, Koma.

KOMA. I nod oonderstand. No honorable calf in bungalow.

TEDDY (*dryly*). Thanks.

JULIANA. We're speaking in parables, Koma. Just concoct your nicest lunch. The twin Prodigals have come home.

KOMA. Ah, yaas. I oonderstand now, mees. I will mek honorable speed.

(*Exit, L. 2 E.*)

(*MRS. B. is at R., front, with BROWN on her left. HELEN is at L., front, with SAUNDERS on her right. JULIANA and TEDDY stand near the doorway, C., back.*)

MRS. B. Algernon, we were just reading about your magnanimous decision.

BROWN (*mystified*). My what ?

HELEN. It was so like you, dad.

JULIANA (*roguishly*). So superbly altruistic !

BROWN. Well, I—I'm afraid I don't quite catch your meaning.

SAUNDERS. I think they must be referring to the pledge we made each other, Mr. Brown—you remember—yesterday morning—out there in the Pacific—when death was staring us in the face.

BROWN. Ah, yes!—after the great air-ship had plunged downward into the sea like—er—like a wounded pigeon.

SAUNDERS. Exactly.

BROWN (*turning to Mrs. B.*). My dear, those were dreadful hours for Saunders and me, adrift on the tangled mass of wreckage.

SAUNDERS. Oh, I shudder to recall it!

HELEN (*sympathetically*). Horace!

BROWN (*soaring eloquently*). The waves were like the huge lapping tongues of Titans, mad to devour us!

JULIANA (*sweetly*). What were the wild waves saying, dad?

MRS. B. (*severely*). Juliana!

BROWN. Many a time in the awful solemnity of those hours we grasped each other's hands in fond farewell—er—didn't we, Saunders?

SAUNDERS. True—too true!

BROWN. The vision of our loved ones was ever before us, and we swore —

JULIANA (*apparently shocked*). Swore!

TEDDY. With death staring you in the face?

JULIANA (*reprovingly*). Oh, dad, how could you be profane at such a time?

BROWN (*irritably*). Who's talking about profanity? I say we swore—resolved—vowed. There! you've broken the thread of my story.

JULIANA (*to TEDDY*). "Story" is good.

BROWN. Saunders, what was it we vowed?

SAUNDERS. Why—er—surely you remember.

BROWN. Well, you see, we made so many vows.

HELEN. Why, dad, we mean your determination never to take another flight.

BROWN (*lightly*). Oh, that?

MRS. B. Yes, Algernon. Our hearts were touched at such devotion.

BROWN (*feelingly*). Thanks, Alberta, thanks.

SAUNDERS. You see, Mrs. Brown, we men are very dense at times.

MRS. B. Yes, I know.

SAUNDERS. We're so unlike you women.

MRS. B. That's a fact.

SAUNDERS. In our zeal for—er—acquisition, we often fail to view life in its proper relations.

JULIANA (*to TEDDY*). Listen to the psychological wonder of the ages.

TEDDY. Horace, the boy phenomenon !

SAUNDERS (*continuing*). We lack something of the feminine power of intuition, I suppose, and need a shock to clarify our—er—perceptions.

BROWN (*hastily*). That's it—that's it exactly. And yesterday morning—when the shock came—out there in mid-ocean, we saw ourselves all at once just as we really were, ambitious, selfish, brutal.

MRS. B. No, no, Algernon ; you exaggerate.

BROWN. Not at all, my dear. In that dire extremity, we realized that the welfare and happiness of those we cherished meant infinitely more to us than any conquest, terrestrial or aerial, and we vowed never again to risk our lives in such mad pursuits.

HELEN. Oh, what nobility of character !

MRS. B. What exquisite sacrifice !

BROWN. Sacrifice—yes, my dear ; and greater perhaps than you will ever know.

MRS. B. Oh, Algernon !

BROWN. But I ask one thing of you in return.

MRS. B. Dear Algernon, whatever it is, I grant it cheerfully.

BROWN. I knew you would. It is this, my dear : never so much as mention the word aviation in my presence again. It is fraught with such bitter associations !

MRS. B. (*reverentially*). I promise, Algernon, I promise.

BROWN (*continuing*). More than that, should you ever again see my name blazoned in the newspapers or the magazines, I ask you resolutely to refrain from reading what is said of me, even though I am heralded as the aviator of the century. (*Loftily*.) That page of my life is—ah—hermetically sealed.

MRS. B. That also I promise, dear.

BROWN. Well, then, we'll settle down to a bucolic existence. I like California, and I'm going to purchase a fruit ranch —

TEDDY (*coming forward*). Please, sir, Horace and I would like a job gathering your peaches.

BROWN. Why, I don't believe Horace is anxious to change his occupation. He's going to marry Helen, you know.

TEDDY. Precisely. And I'm asking for Juliana.

BROWN (*smiling*). Oh, I see.

MRS. B. (*with astonishment*). Asking for Juliana? Why, that's absolutely preposterous.

TEDDY (*modestly*). Oh, I'm not worthy of her. I understand that perfectly well.

JULIANA. Nonsense!

HELEN. You mustn't be offended at what mother says, Mr. Nixon. Of course, you may be a very estimable young man, but, you see, you haven't proved your mettle as Horace has done.

TEDDY. I should say not!

MRS. B. Frankly, Mr. Nixon, you can't expect us to look with favor —

JULIANA (*crisply*). Speak up, dad! (*Significantly.*) Remember, one good turn deserves another.

BROWN (*nervously*). Yes, yes—that's so. (*Turns to MRS. B.*) My dear Alberta, aren't you just a wee bit severe on Mr. Nixon? Have you forgotten how he stood by us when the gaunt hand of Death was stretched over the troublous waters? Why, if he hadn't stuck to his post last night, sending message after message out into the vast unknown, the "Japonica" would never have come to our rescue, and at this very moment, I, your husband, would be reposing down with the shell-fish at the bottom of the sea.

MRS. B. (*profoundly affected*). Say no more, Algernon—say no more. (*Turns to TEDDY.*) Mr. Nixon, take Juliana; she is yours.

TEDDY. Thank you, Mrs. Brown! I will try to make her happy.

(*Enter KOMA, L. 2 E.*)

KOMA. Honorable ladies and august gentlemen—the lunch, id is served.

JULIANA. Good!

HELEN. Lead the way, father.

JULIANA. Don't hurry. Wait for the music, dad.

BROWN. The music? Oh, yes—certainly.

(*JULIANA approaches the talking-machine.*)

TEDDY (*to KOMA*). Did you assassinate the calf, KOMA?

KOMA (*grinning*). No, sir. Honorable aviators lunch on birds, sir. I have cooked liddle quails on toasd.

SAUNDERS. How delightful !

JULIANA (*looking up as she adjusts a record in the machine —teasingly*). Sorry we haven't any nectar or ambrosia, dad ; but when gods descend to earth, you know ——

MRS. B. (*with extreme dignity*). Juliana, have you forgotten your father's wishes ? Remember, we are never to mention his sky riding exploits again.

(JULIANA starts the music. BROWN offers his arm to MRS. B., SAUNDERS to HELEN, and TEDDY to JULIANA. KOMA stands at side of door, R. 2 E., attentively. All exeunt, R. 2 E., to the strains of the music.)

CURTAIN

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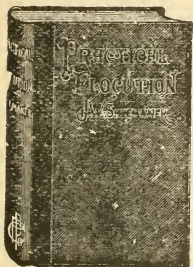
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